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The Place To Attain Literacy
Pedro's Question—the LRC's Answer
New Language Center in Town / Large Print in Focus

BOOKS FOR THE SPANISH-SPEAKING

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Library outreach services and expanded collections are like a treasure waiting to be discovered. Cover by Keiko Matsumoto

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A sample survey of U.S. public libraries reveals a trend in collecting ESL and foreign language audiocassettes

New Language Center in Town

By Carolyn Stapleton & Sharon N. Eaton

A STEADILY GROWING number of public libraries are beginning to establish their own foreign language learning centers. This new trend in library services, developing side-by-side with the mushrooming popularity of audiocassette programs in general, is due to the availability of comprehensive self-study courses in a variety of foreign languages.

Promotion by word-of-mouth

These full-length, in-depth courses (ten or more cassettes), providing extensive oral practice through dialogs and pronunciation drills, give the learner a base for conversational fluency in a foreign language. Libraries which have made such courses available report enthusiastic acceptance by their patrons. In fact, most find there is little need to advertise their language learning centers since patrons quickly find out about them by word-of-mouth. Some have waiting lists even before the tapes arrive. Mary K. Spore-Alhadef, audiovisual librarian in Redwood City, California, describes foreign language tapes as a "pre-sold commodity" and other libraries report that they cannot keep enough of the popular languages on the shelves.

A survey sampling of public libraries with a foreign language learning center reveals an astonishing variety of reasons why this service is so heavily used. Probably the most frequently cited is preparation for a trip abroad. Not surprisingly, French, Spanish, Italian, and German are the most sought after language courses.

Other reasons range from "affairs of the family"—keeping alive the language of the family heritage or understanding family members from the old country—to "affairs of the heart"—dating or marrying a foreigner who speaks little if any English. Though the reasons may be many and varied why these centers are in such demand, certainly they can meet a diversity of learning needs.

A variety of requests

Librarians at language centers are growing accustomed to filling requests. A newly married man in Chicago was anxious to take out a course in Swedish. His wife's parents were about to visit them from Sweden for the first time, and he wanted to be able to speak to them in their native tongue. Janice Adams, a Salt Lake County librarian, reports heavy use of the center by Mormon missionaries preparing for work overseas, and also airline stewardesses. "We also see many members of the National Guard," she says. "Some of them were sent recently to Korea, so we have found that the Korean language tapes have been in great demand." "We even get requests for languages like Gaelic and Welsh," she continues, "These are from people interested in tracing their roots." But sometimes the reasons are less obvious: "We once had a waiting list of five people for Mandarin."

Ed Peltier of Boston Public Library reports similar heavy usage. "Major foreign languages are most in demand of all [spoken-word] tapes," he reports, "and there seem to be more requests for advanced materials." He notes that many of these patrons are people who never use libraries, "and might wish to borrow tapes rather than purchase them."

In Guilford, Connecticut two enterprising 11-year-old girls tried out the Hebrew and Japanese courses during their summer vacation. In fact, the collection of language courses in this small coastline town has become

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so popular since it became available in 1984, and the waiting list so long, that a library volunteer purchased extra courses with her own money to help satisfy the demand.

English as a Second Language

Language centers in public libraries can also satisfy another extremely important community need by providing English as a Second Language (ESL) tapes to help refugees and immigrants learn English. Connie Mulder at the Public Library of Columbus and Franklin County, Ohio sees many volunteer tutors borrowing tapes for themselves so that they can communicate more effectively with the refugee students to whom they are teaching English.

Grace Liu, assistant media librarian, San Jose Public Library, reports "the current [ESL] collection is constantly in demand. They are almost never on the shelves." Liu plans to add pronunciation courses as well as intermediate- and advanced-level materials. San Jose's "Library Awareness Project," implemented with money from a federal grant in 1984–1986, played a key role in informing the public of the ESL collection. A video program was shown to newcomers to this country on how to use the library's entire collection.

It is clear that once a center is opened both foreign language and ESL courses and programs on tape become very popular and add another dimension to the library's service to the community and its needs.

Audio-Forum Index to American Adult Language Learning Interests
1984, 1985, 1986

Language	Pct. of 1984 Inquiries	Pct. of 1985 Inquiries	Pct. of 1986 Inquiries
Spanish	22.41	23.09	26.55
French	19.52	18.66	17.39
German	12.57	12.48	11.11
Russian	5.95	5.47	5.76
Italian	5.68	5.25	5.54
Japanese	4.62	4.86	4.71
Greek, Modern	3.51	3.17	2.49
Arabic	3.33	2.73	1.92
Polish	2.13	2.15	1.61
Hebrew	0.90	2.05	1.40
Chinese	1.66	1.92	1.28
Portuguese	1.57	1.92	1.74
Korean	1.68	1.55	1.43
Vietnamese	0.99	1.31	0.89
Mandarin	1.18	1.11	1.36
Swedish	1.04	1.00	1.52
Tagalog	1.52	0.99	0.80
Turkish	0.59	0.72	0.77
Hungarian	0.47	0.61	1.18
Thai	0.57	0.60	0.56
Norwegian	0.55	0.58	0.66
Dutch	0.69	0.56	0.69
Danish	0.46	0.43	0.64
Latin	0.31	0.45	0.58
Finish	0.34	0.42	0.57

© Audio-Forum Index to American Adult Language Interests is compiled annually by Audio-Forum, Guilford, Connecticut. Total inquiries by language annually were 26,481 (1984), 26,232 (1985), and 20,265 (1986).

***This index lists** for the last three years the 25 most requested languages nationwide in order of popularity*

Changing times, changing tongues

Why are foreign language tapes so popular? Jeffrey Norton, president of Audio-Forum, has some answers. "I feel there has always been an enormous number of people with a strong desire to learn a foreign language," he says. "But up to now they have not had the time or opportunity to do it. Before cassette courses were available, you had to enroll in a class or hire a private tutor . . . . Now, with the availability of tape players in cars and Walkman®-type machines designed for use while jogging or walkng the dog, these people can develop quite a high degree of fluency by committing 25 or 30 minutes a day . . . . people learn the same way they learned English—by listening and repeating. The focus is speaking and listening comprehension, while complex grammar rules are minimized."

Why today, more than previously, are librarians building collections of foreign language tapes? The answer is simple: Times have changed and language tapes do not present the special problems to librarians that they did earlier. Even two or three years ago many librarians felt that it was necessary to provide cassette players along with the tapes. Today, however, there are very few requests for cassette players as they have become a standard item in most homes.

Librarians were also concerned about the ease with which tapes could be lost or destroyed. Most librarians now seem to agree that this is not as serious a difficulty as might be imagined, especially since many foreign language publishers offer low-cost replacement tapes to public libraries, and permit no-charge copying for archival purposes.

Practical considerations

Storage of tapes can be a problem but librarians seem to be handling this in a variety of practical and aesthetic ways. Libraries that have established language centers house all foreign language materials—tapes, records, and books—in the same section on open shelves. Other libraries, most typically, keep the tapes and foreign language records in the audiovisual department. Some display tapes from the courses on an attractive carousel by the main desk, while others make them available only upon request, keeping them out of sight or even under lock and key.

The Ramapo Catskill Library System of New York, which services 52 libraries, houses its collection at its headquarters and mails tapes upon request to individual libraries. This system also keeps a strict watch on patrons who keep the tapes out over their due date. If a tape is returned late, the patron is prohibited from taking the tape out again.

Although time limits for borrowing vary widely nationwide, from as little as a week to as much as three months, the average loan period is

four weeks, with an option to renew unless there is a waiting list. Many libraries report that patrons often fail to return the tapes on time for fear they will not be able to renew.

Keeping all materials together appears to be a difficulty for some libraries, but others report that the purchase of clear plastic bags to keep tapes and printed materials (texts, manuals, dictionaries, etc.) together works well. One librarian suggests that publishers supply extra texts with courses as often texts are lost. Another use for additional texts has been devised by some libraries. By dividing the tapes and packaging them with a text, they can circulate the programs to more than one patron at a time while achieving a lower overall cost.

Funding remains the most frequently cited obstacle which public libraries face when attempting to start or enlarge a foreign language center. Most libraries use monies from their annual budgets allocated for this purpose, but federal or state funding is sometimes available. The Public Library of Columbus and Franklin County received federal grant funding for courses used by volunteer tutors helping refugees to learn English. It is also planning to enlarge its collection with an International Trade and Travel Grant from the state library with the aim of attracting more international trade and business into the Columbus area.

Where budgetary restrictions impose an extremely limited number of course offerings, it is sometimes helpful to make available publishers' catalogs and ordering information, as some patrons are willing to purchase courses themselves. There is also the possibility of borrowing courses from other library systems.

The North Carolina model

The North Carolina Foreign Language Center at the Cumberland County Public Library in Fayetteville, for instance, honors out-of-state ILL requests, providing certain requirements are met: postage must be paid, and the requesting state's ILL librarian must first consult their own local and regional resources.

Cumberland's center, established in 1976, may be regarded as a model from which other libraries may gather valuable information. By offering a central service point for foreign language public library services in North Carolina, the center minimizes several problems. First, it could afford the services of a full-time, language-trained librarian to meet its stated goal of "serving the multilingual needs of all residents of North Carolina." Director Lee Krieger says the staff "has doubled in size to include two full-time librarians and three clerical assistants." The second advantage is that by "focusing dollars in one resource center, duplication of collections in the state could be eliminated and a wide variety of languages can be offered."

The original purpose of the center was to supply resource materials for non-native-English speakers. As the collection grew to an estimated 1300 cassette materials, the goal of providing service to Americans wishing to learn a foreign language became important. Krieger notes that "the wide variety of languages offered—from Amharic to Zulu—is the best publicity the center has." By offering materials on obscure languages, the center has received inquiries from the entire Eastern seaboard. According to Krieger, use of this portion of the center's collection is increasing.

The Foreign Language Center has been active in a large number of educational and cultural programs: it has functioned as an information and resource center within the Cape Fear Citizens Committee on Immigration, a body which acts as a bridge between aliens and refugees and the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, and participates in the Fayetteville International Folk Festival, a "major, one-day extravaganza."

The center sends out a newsletter to about 900 in-state locations, including school districts. An ongoing educational program for libraries is offered through workshops and an active travel program. All materials, including novels, are completely cataloged, and all catalog cards have author/title and sometimes imprint information in the original script. The center maintains a single alphabet catalog of author/title/subject for each language and has distributed a microfiche copy of its card catalog to every participating library system.

Our national deficiency

Even public libraries with smaller foreign language course collections than Cumberland's play a key role in helping regional and federal efforts overcome what many believe to be a national deficiency—Americans' inability to speak foreign languages. Senator Paul Simon (D-Ill.) points out that the "decline in foreign language ability among otherwise well-educated Americans was accelerated during the 1960s when faculty and administrators embraced students' demands for a less structured curriculum." In *The Tongue-Tied American* (Continuum, 1980), he says that the "United States is the only nation where you can graduate from college without having had one year of a foreign language . . . . It is even possible to earn a doctorate here without studying any foreign language."

Americans doing business abroad state that the inability to speak another language can be a real disadvantage in negotiations. "You can buy in any language but you sell in the language of the customer." In 1983, most of the 1000 American salespeople in all of Japan spoke no Japanese, while almost all the 10,000 Japanese salespeople in New York City alone spoke English. Some libraries are finding that their collection of foreign language tapes is an important and handy resource not only for local companies doing business overseas, but also for supervisors and managers of workers for whom English is a second language.

The Dade County way

The Miami-Dade Public Library, Florida is meeting the needs of a bilingual and even trilingual population, according to Tom Cummings, director of planning and evaluation. He reports that Dade County "is unique in the true diversity of its culture. There is an equal demand for ESL materials as for French and Spanish as foreign language materials."

"Perhaps Dade County is the United States of the next century," Cummings adds. "Neighborhoods are a mini–United Nations and it is common to find restaurants of many nations on the same street. The population now has persons who were born in some 200 foreign countries." To meet the needs of residents, and the international banking and trade communities, most branches of the library have foreign language collections and bilingual or trilingual staff members. The library's collection now includes material for 46 living languages and offers space for night classes in English and Spanish. It has established a Hispanic branch, and collection materials for the large Haitian and French-Canadian populations.

Many libraries responding to the times are increasing their acquisition of foreign language materials, especially language programs on tape accompanied by books. More language centers, appropriate to community interests and needs, will appear in time and become a goal of libraries, large and small, across the nation.